Civilian Research Project
Senior Service College Fellow

# Religious Rhetoric in National Security Strategy Since 9/11

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A
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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved*
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

| **1. REPORT DATE** *(DD-MM-YYYY)* | **2. REPORT TYPE** | **3. DATES COVERED** *(From - To)* |
|---|---|---|
| 22-03-2012 | Civilian Research Paper | |

**4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE**

Religious Rhetoric in National Security Strategy Since 9/11

**5a. CONTRACT NUMBER**

**5b. GRANT NUMBER**

**5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER**

**6. AUTHOR(S)**

Ch (LTC) Peter J. Lawson

**5d. PROJECT NUMBER**

**5e. TASK NUMBER**

**5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER**

**7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)**
George Mason University
School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
3330 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**

**9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)**
U.S. Army War College
122 Forbes Avenue
Carlisle, PA 17013

**10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)**

**11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)**

**12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**
DISTRIBUTION A: Unlimited

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

## 14. ABSTRACT

Religious influence is undeniably evident in the development and promotion of National Security Strategy since 9-11. This paper examines the influence of religion in the National Security Strategies of the Bush and Obama administrations, and more specifically the religious rhetoric articulated in policy documents and political speeches to gain support for their strategic vision. It will examine the effects and implications of each approach on both the American populace and the international community, with specific focus on the effects and implications on Muslims in the international community whom the U.S. seeks to secure as allies and key partners. The critical questions related to this topic are the motivation for the utilization of religious rhetoric to promote NSS, the use of religious rhetoric advantageous to the promotion of NSS, and the persuasion or alienation of groups by selected religious rhetoric, CONUS and OCONUS.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**
Religion, Culture, Language, Rhetoric, Islam

| **16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:** | | | **17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** | **18. NUMBER OF PAGES** | **19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **a. REPORT** | **b. ABSTRACT** | **c. THIS PAGE** | | | **19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER** *(include area code)* |
| UNCLASSIFED | UNCLASSIFED | UNCLASSIFED | UNLIMITED | 56 | |

USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

# RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY SINCE 9/11

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This CRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Senior Service College fellowship.
the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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## ABSTRACT


AUTHOR: CH (LTC) Peter Lawon

TITLE: Religious Rhetoric in National Security Strategy Since 9/11

FORMAT: Civilian Research Project

DATE: 22 March 2012 WORD COUNT: 12,210 PAGES: 56

KEY TERMS : Religion, Culture, Language, Rhetoric, Islam

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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# RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY SINCE 9/11

## INTRODUCTION

U.S. Presidents and other political leaders throughout the nation's history have articulated the national purpose through religious rhetoric, that is, through the use of religious language to motivate and inspire the American people. President Lincoln referenced the "Almighty" and utilized biblical imagery in several of his speeches during the dark days of Civil War. Similarly, Franklin D. Roosevelt did not hesitate to cite God as a source of hope during the difficult days of World War II, and more recently President Bush freely used religiously couched language in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 and throughout the period of the War on Terror while he was president. President Obama has also integrated religious language into his inaugural address and key policy speeches.

This description of the use of religious language as religious rhetoric is not meant to be pejorative. For many people, the term "rhetoric" has a strictly negative connotation. It is often perceived as language which political leaders use to distort or manipulate facts in order to gain a political advantage or support for a political cause. While it is true that rhetoric is by definition manipulative in that it is "the language of persuasion," it is not necessarily born out of the intent to distort.[1] For the many leaders who have utilized it throughout the history of the U.S. nation, religious rhetoric is in fact a sincere application of language which clarifies what they have understood the nation's purpose to be to be.

This paper will examine the role of religious rhetoric in the articulation and promotion of the National Security Strategies (NSS) since 9/11, that is, of the Bush and

Obama administrations, and more specifically how both strategies utilize religious rhetoric to gain support for their respective strategic visions. It will explore not only what is written in the strategy documents themselves, but also what is expressed in the speeches of both presidents in promoting their strategies. It will assess the strengths and weaknesses of each by looking at how their religious rhetoric impacts both the American populace and the international community, and then will look at the implications of the use of religious rhetoric in the promotion and formation of future strategies.

# CHAPTER ONE

## RELIGIOUS RHETORIC AND ITS HISTORIC RELATION TO CIVIL RELIGION

It is appropriate to begin a discussion about religious rhetoric by examining its relationship to civil religion. The term civil religion was formalized in a 1967 essay by Robert Bellah called *Civil Religion in America* in which he wrote about how a divine purpose permeated the understanding of the United States' national purpose through the influence of various religious communities which established themselves in America.[2] There is little argument amongst scholars that many of the earliest settlers believed that America was considered a new beginning for the furtherance of their religious practice and influence. Robert Handy, in his book, A Christian America, pointed out that from the outset this was a Christian movement, and a Protestant Christian movement at that.[3] Horace Bushnell, a nineteenth century educator, is one of a plethora of influential proponents of this movement who believed that America was a land renewed hope where God's new plan of redemption was to unfold and that the American people were to be key players in the drama of that redemption, stating, "we will not cease, till a Christian nation throws up its temples of worship on every hill and plain."[4] For those of who embraced this line of thinking, it was not enough for people to be given the right to exercise the freedom of their faith regardless of what that faith might have been, it was the Christian faith and the practice of the Christian Faith that mattered.

Bellah's assertion however, was that civil religion was not to be confused with a specific religious faith or denomination but was in fact its own distinct religious entity with its own unique qualities and dimensions.[5] In Bellah's vein of thinking, civil religion

is a more “generalized concept” which conveys a broad based understanding of religious belief and practice. In his essay he cited the example of the Kennedy inaugural address in which the President made reference to the deity as the “Almighty” but shied away from religious language which identified it with a specific religious organization.[6] The uniqueness of civil religion, in his view, was that even though it did not represent a specific religious organization, it did represent a religious quality which aligned it with the national purpose.[7]

In regards to the inevitable tension which civil religion causes in relation to the separation of church and state clause of the constitution, Bellah argued that this tension is not irreconcilable, stating that, “Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share.”[8] This means, in is mind, that even though there are diverse religious beliefs practiced in America, civil religion has the ability to appeal to a large portion of them, offering a religious commonality which transcends these differences. This is also why, in his view, national leaders so often conveyed religious language in generalist terms. The more the language is associated with a specific religion or religious organization, the smaller the scope of appeal will be.

Bellah’s assessment on civil religion directly relates to religious rhetoric and the reasons national leaders utilize it. There has been a longstanding tradition in the United States of associating a divine purpose to the national purpose, and accordingly there has been a longstanding utilization of religious rhetoric to reinforce this association. When one considers the unifying power that civil religion has on the American populace

because of its ability to transcend differences amongst a religiously diverse populace, it is not hard to see why national leaders would value religious rhetoric as a powerful tool of persuasion.

Consider, for example, its appeal to those who belong to a specific faith group. Even as Bellah contended that civil religion was not specific to any particular religious organization or belief system, the hearer of this language could apply this to one's specific faith belief. For example, when President Kennedy used the word "Almighty" in his inaugural address, Protestants could associate this meaning to their specific understanding of Almighty within their specific Protestant faith group, as could Roman Catholics, or a Jewish person to his or her specifically Jewish understanding of faith.

Additionally, there are those who do not belong to a particular faith group and may not even practice a formalized religion. These are people who may have some kind of belief in a deity, but do not belong to any specific faith group or denomination. These are the people who appreciate the language of civil religion precisely because it does not strap them to a specific denomination or constricted belief system.

Another segment of the American population which religious rhetoric has the ability to reach are those who are not religious at all but who hold the values of the United States, as they understand them, with such a degree of sacredness that they take on a kind of divine quality and are respected with a religious-like devotion. These values Bellah referred to as "transcendent" in that they are seen as a standard above and greater than individual and personal values.[9]

The point being made here is that religious rhetoric has the ability not only to appeal to a diverse spectrum of religious beliefs, but also to diverse degrees of

religiosity. For these reasons U.S. leaders have been able to effectively utilize this framework of language as a tool to promote their political agenda and specifically in the promotion of National Security Strategy.

Another helpful perspective on religious rhetoric concerns what sociologist Wade Clark Roof called "priestly rhetoric" and "prophetic rhetoric," explaining that priestly rhetoric, "blesses America as a chosen nation with a special mission to fulfill and legitimate its actions," whereas "prophetic rhetoric places less emphasis on America as a chosen nation and is more critical of its missteps."[10] Simply stated, priestly rhetoric emphasizes the special blessings of God on the nation, that is what is good and right, while prophetic rhetoric emphasizes the nation's deficiencies, what is bad and wrong.[11] For example, a political leader may utilize a priestly rhetoric to underscore the nation's greatness because of its association with a divine purpose and the understanding that it has a "chosen" status among the nations of the world. On the other hand, political leaders may invoke prophetic rhetoric to point out how the nation has fallen short of meeting the standard of the greatness to which the Divine has called it.

In addition to the two titles which Roof described, it would be appropriate to add another title and function of religious rhetoric and that is pastoral. Pastoral rhetoric emphasizes words of hope and encouragement during difficult times. In this way, presidents can play a clergy-like role to the nation, dispensing expressions of civil religion to offer hope in times of crisis (pastoral), to remind people of the nation's special blessing from God (priest), and when necessary, to point out the nation's deficiencies which diminish this blessing (prophet). These three roles and functions of religious rhetoric also impact the promotion of National Security Strategy, especially in regards to

how presidents utilize them. The next chapter will examine how these roles came into play in the promotion of the Bush administration's NSS and will show how the footprint of civil religion and its related components made their mark on the administration's policy.

# CHAPTER TWO

## RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

When looking at the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy after 9/11, one sees a significant use of religious rhetoric in both policy documents and in the speeches of the President in various venues. Clearly, religious belief played a prominent role in both the formation and promotion of the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy. As stated in the previous chapter, this is not unique, as presidents and other national leaders have employed religious rhetoric to gain support for their strategic vision. What is unique with the Bush Administration was the degree and frequency of its usage.[12]

It needs to be taken into account that much of President Bush's references to God came in response to the extraordinary and tragic events of September 11, 2001. While the President most assuredly had his personal religious convictions which he was willing to share in the public arena prior to 9-11, they were not articulated in a manner which reflected his views on America's role in the world.[13] With the September 11 attacks however, these convictions became more integrated into his administration's policy strategy and the rhetoric much more clearly defined America's role in the world.

This chapter will examine the primary themes of the Bush Administration's religious rhetoric following September 11 as expressed in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategy publications and select speeches of the President. Then it will look at the implications of this rhetoric in relation to the American populace and the international community.

## THEME OF GOOD VERSUS EVIL AND AMERICA'S SACRED RESPONSIBILITY

The first prominent religious theme conveyed by the Bush administration following September 11 is the theme of good versus evil and America's responsibility to defeat evil. His emphasis on America's role and responsibility in this regard echoes the traces of civil religion and specifically to what Clark Roof described as "priestly rhetoric" which emphasizes that America is a, "…chosen nation with a special mission to fulfill."[14] The understanding is that the War on Terror is a battle being fought not simply to preserve the security of the United States but in fact to rid the world of an evil force. This theme found formation immediately following the September 11 attacks. On September 14, during the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance service at the Washington Cathedral, he shared these words: "Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history, but our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of *evil*."[15] These words conveyed not only his understanding of the war as one of good versus evil, but also his conviction of America's responsibility to be the sacred agent to defeat the forces of evil. This theme is also evident in the President's State of the Union address on January 29, 2002. In this address he repeatedly referred to the terrorists and their actions as evil and also referenced that they underestimated the goodness of Americans who responded to the attacks.[16] Here the President also made it clear that the justification for his security actions was based on an understanding of the enemy as an evil force which must be defeated. This "evil enemy" stood in contrast to the American people before whom he "stood in awe" because of the way they responded to

the crisis.[17] The President used the occasion of this speech to remind Americans that they were, "…called to a unique role in human events."[18]

In the President's address to graduates at West Point in June of 2002, one sees a repetition of the theme and the rigidity with which he held it when he said, "There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent and the guilty. We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call *evil* by its name."[19] He then reiterated his belief concerning America's responsibility, saying, "…we will lead the world in opposing it (evil)."[20] The framing of this language indicates a clear demarcation between good and evil and the vital role that America as a nation is to play in the opposition to it. Here the President was saying the choice was clear: either one supports the "good" of the American purpose or the "evil" of the terrorists' purpose. The President also reiterated this theme to an international audience in a speech in Berlin on May 23, 2002, in which he warned of the dire consequences to the international community if the terrorist threat was ignored and referred to the terrorists as an "axis of evil."[21]

An important consideration to this theme is the President's embrace of Islam as a viable religion and his insistence that the terrorists represented an aberration and distortion of Islam and not its true essence. For this reason he was careful not to lump the whole Muslim world into this category of "evil." The 2006 NSS document expresses the sentiment that the War on Terror is not a war of one religion over and against another.[22] The President expressed similar thoughts in his January 29, 2002 State of the Union address, where he again emphasized that the terrorists did not represent

mainstream Islam, calling it, “a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.”[23]

These references indicate that the President not only affirmed the religion of Islam as noble and worthy, they also expressed his desire that Muslims of the international community join the United States in the War on Terror. In terms of security strategy, the intent was to form alliances with Muslim international partners to join the forces of “good” over and against the terrorist forces of “evil.”

THEME OF FREEDOM AS A GIFT OF GOD AND UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHT

The second religiously related theme expressed in the Bush Administration’s NSS is the theme of freedom as a gift of God and an inherent right of all people. That the theme of freedom as a universal right was critical to the President’s foreign policy is undeniable, and was in fact a major driving force in driving the rationale of the 2002 and 2006 NSS documents.[24] In the Prologue of the 2002 NSS, the President stated, “Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person – in every civilization”[25] The opening paragraph of this document states: “Our first imperative is to clarify what we stand for: the United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.”[26] In his address to the West Point Cadets in 2002 he said, “When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations. The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and Latin America and the entire Islamic world.”[27] The President repeated this theme in several venues and in his espousal of it he affirmed what he believed to be a core American value.

Yet, the President spoke about freedom as something more than an American value; it was for him God’s design and intention for all of humanity. In his

commencement address at Concordia University in Wisconsin in 2004, he explicitly stated, “The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is the Almighty God's gift to all humanity.”[28] In saying this, the obvious implication is that the fight for freedom is in accordance to the Divine will, and accordingly a security strategy which touts the importance of this fight is worthy of support.

Also of significance is that this theme is inextricably bound to an understanding of the inherent worth of the human person. In his speech at Concordia he was explicit: “Our worth as human beings does not depend on our health or productivity or independence or any other shifting value the world might apply. Our worth comes from bearing the image of our Maker”[29] Freedom, as he explained it, is a fundamental right of all persons because all persons bear the stamp of the God who created them, and the inherent worth of the individual stems from being created in God’s image. The implication then is that defending America’s freedom as well as the international community’s freedom is in fact carrying out the will of God.

THEME OF PROVIDENCE AND BLESSING

Interwoven with these aforementioned themes is the theme of providence and blessing, that is, the understanding that America has received a special blessing from God as a nation and that God’s providential hand is at work to guide and sustain the nation. This theme also speaks to the concept of “priestly rhetoric” in that it promotes the idea of a special relationship God has formed with the American nation, and that because God has formed this relationship, God will continue to watch over the nation as a divine overseer. While it is true that priestly rhetoric speaks to America’s responsibility to exercise its sacred duty, it also speaks to affirm God’s care and

oversight of the nation God has chosen for this purpose. This theme was played out most prominently in the aftermath of "9-11" as the President summoned people to have hope in the face of their devastation. Clearly one sees this in the President's remarks to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001:

> Tonight I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."[30]

One also sees this theme in the closing remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance held at the Washington Cathedral three days following the attacks, when he asked that God, "…watch over our nation and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come," and then concluded with these words, "May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country."[31]

This use of religious language, which in these cases included specific references to Christian and Judaic scripture, also serves as an example of "pastoral rhetoric," which was also discussed in chapter one. During times of national crisis and tragedy, presidents often play a pastoral role to the nation by invoking religious language to instill hope and encouragement in the American people.

SUMMARY OF BUSH THEMES

To summarize, the Bush administration's religious rhetoric emphasizes the theme of good versus evil. The "good" are the forces which uphold the freedom and human dignity of all persons and the "evil" are those forces which do not. This is based on an understanding that all persons are created in the image of God and have been given the inherent right to live as free persons. America, which has received God's

special blessing and continues to be sustained by God's providence, is the primary player as this force for good, but the invitation is extended to the international community to join in this same effort, including members of the Muslim communities. The religion of Islam is a good and noble religion, but the terrorists have wrongly claimed it as theirs and distorted its central values to suit their evil purposes.

## EVALUATION OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S RELIGIOUS RHETORIC

It is not the intent of this paper to argue whether presidents and other national leaders have the right to inject their personal religious beliefs into their foreign policy decisions or to debate the application of the free exercise of religion and separation between church and state clauses of the constitution; rather, it is to gain perspective on the impact and implications of religious rhetoric on both the American populace and the international community. In evaluating the Bush Administration's religious rhetoric employed throughout the War on Terror then, it is appropriate to ask the question relevant to this intent. Was it effective in gaining support for the administration's strategic vision in the national security strategy? On certain levels the answer to this strategic question would be yes.

President Bush's religious rhetoric was effective in that it drew clear lines of demarcation between what the President understood to be right and what he understood to be wrong. In his address to the nation following the day after the 9-11 attacks he said, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists…freedom and fear, justice and cruelty have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them."[32] The strength of this dualistic approach is its simplicity in that it provided listeners with a clear choice between what the President considered to be

good and evil. Such an approach has the ability to appeal to people from a broad spectrum of religious belief and different layers of religiosity because it espouses what many perceive as universal religious values which transcend differences. As was discussed earlier on the topic of civil religion, religious language can be applied to various levels of religious persuasion and religiosity, and this is especially true when the lines (in this case between good and evil) are clearly drawn. Whether one has strongly held tenets of religious belief or nominal beliefs, the choice, as the President described it, is a clear one. Because of its appeal to a large range of religious persuasions, this aspect of the Bush religious rhetoric had the ability to unite people in supporting the President's NSS.

This rhetoric is also appealing to a theological mindset which is comprised of what is often referred to as Evangelical Christianity.[33] This is worthy of examination, not only because of the influence of this particular faith community but also because the President readily identified himself with this particular community of faith. In the book Belief and Bloodshed, James Wellman pointed out that many leaders who identified themselves as evangelical quickly came to support the Iraq war. In a survey he conducted in 2004, of twenty four of the fastest growing evangelical churches in the Pacific Northwest, "only fifteen out of 298 clergy and members did not support the war in Iraq."[34] Wellman contended that the preponderance of those who identified themselves as evangelicals were more likely to support state sponsored violence in general, and were particularly supportive when it was seen as a means of combating the forces of what they considered to be evil.[35]

Evangelicals also tend to embrace aspects of civil religion which identify national purpose with a divine one, but with a specifically Christian and evangelical leaning. This inclination, Wellman explained, stems from the historical roots of the evangelical tradition in America.[36] Wellman stated:

> The nineteenth century featured a homogeneous American evangelical culture that centered on scripture but assumed that Christianization, Americanization, civilization were homologous terms. By the turn of the twentieth century it was taken for granted by American politicians that America was a Christian nation.[37]

While it is true that this assessment may not appear relevant to the present pluralistic American culture, the idea that America should be, or is in fact at its core, a Christian nation remains a very real mindset for many of those who identify themselves as evangelicals. Even though the President never explicitly endorsed the claim that America is a Christian nation, many contend that the President's rhetoric implied that he did. One such proponent is Chris Mooney from the American Prospect. In his essay, *W's Christian Nation: How Bush Promotes Religion and Erodes the Separation of Church and State*, Mooney contended that the President often injected religious language into his speeches to appeal to this evangelical Christian base.[38] For example, he cited that in the January 29, 2002 State of the Union speech Bush mentioned the "wonder-working power" of the American people, which was alluding to an evangelical Christian song the lyrics of which reference the "power, wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb"-i.e., Jesus."[39] When religious language is framed in such a manner, it can make a powerful appeal to this particular community within the Christian Faith.

Moreover, within this evangelical framework is often a strong belief element known as apocalyptic. This strain of evangelical thought emphasizes a cosmic struggle of good and evil which will culminate in a final showdown between God and demonic

powers at the end.[40] This is to say that the apocalyptic understanding of the struggle against evil relates to more than what is embodied within and among human persons or political entities; it is for them quite literally a struggle among cosmic and supernatural powers played out on the world stage of history.[41] When the War on Terror became identified with this cosmic struggle, the President gained significant support from apocalyptic adherents within the evangelical community.

IMPACT ON THE AMERICAN POPULACE

While it can be argued that the President's rhetoric was effective in unifying the American nation following the events of 9-11, it must also be admitted that it played a role in dividing it. The cause of this division related primarily to those who identified themselves as something other than evangelical Christians. These include people who practice a religious faith other than Christianity, those who hold to a Christian faith but who do not identify themselves as evangelical, and those who do not practice a religious faith at all. In short, this contingent did not recognize the espoused values of the President as transcendent or universal but in fact perceived them as restricted to a particular faith system and ideology, in this case Evangelical Christianity.

In regards to those who practice a religious faith other than Christianity, many expressed outrage that the President was either implicitly or explicitly identifying the national purpose as a Christian one. This included Jews, Hindus, as well as Muslims who practice their faith in the United States. While it may have been the President's intent to appeal to a broader religious base, the perception for many in this contingent of the population was that the language was specifically Christian.

Another group which expressed its concern about the President's rhetoric represented those who identified themselves as Christians but were concerned with how he, "…conflates his personal faith with his role as president."[42] This contingent of the population, while Christian, is resistant to the understanding that America holds special divine preference or has received a divine blessing which sets it apart from others and are thus resistant to perpetuating the idea that America is a Christian nation. For them, God shows no partiality among the various people's and nations because God is the creator of all persons.

In light of what has been said, it would appear that one of the strengths of the Bush administration's religious rhetoric, its dualism, is also its weakness, because it conveys a rigidity which many find excluding. As previously mentioned, the President drew a clear line between America's purpose and the purpose of those who are opposed to America, and he utilized binary religious terminology to draw that line. Thus, one sees the rhetorical theme of good versus evil being communicated in such a way that there is little room for anything or for that matter any-*one* in between, and if one's perspective does not fall neatly into either category, one must ask if that means that he or she is against America and on the side of evil. Surely the answer is no.

Also, while the President freely used the term *evil* in his rhetoric to describe the enemy, there is very little, if anything, said to define its meaning. Evil is a highly charged religious term which is debated on many theological levels among many religious entities and for this reason has several nuances and layers of meaning. To use this term without providing some kind of qualification for its meaning is to invite

disparate understandings and interpretations within the American populace, many of which can be counterproductive to NSS support

On a deeper level, the use of this binary religious terminology of good versus evil can easily lead people of the United States toward a mindset of demonization. While this terminology may inspire and motivate Americans of a certain religious leading to support an administration's NSS, it can also blind them to their own deficiencies, fostering a belief that any U.S. security measure is justifiable in so far as it seeks to destroy what is understood to be evil. The more a nation demonizes a specific group, the less likely it is to objectively examine its own actions and hold itself accountable, which is precisely what a democratic society should be predisposed to do. This willingness to hold the nation accountable for its actions speaks to the third role which national leaders play in relation to the American people and that is of prophet. As discussed in the first chapter, in addition to "priestly" and "pastoral" rhetoric, there is also "prophetic" rhetoric which speaks to the deficiencies of the nation and the need to take action to change these deficiencies.[43] If prophetic rhetoric highlights what is wrong with the nation rather than what is right, this form of rhetoric was conspicuously absent from the President's rhetoric.

IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Another concern about the President's rhetoric is that it did not account for the diversity of the international community. The result was an undeniably antagonizing effect on the Muslim nations and communities throughout the world, including the very Muslims the President was soliciting to be U.S. Allies. While the President continually attempted to portray the religion of Islam in a positive light, a number of Muslims did not

see it that way, especially when the President used terminology to describe America's enemies which many Muslims saw as casting Islam as a whole in a negative light. This terminology included phrases such as, "radical Jihadists," "Islamic Radicalism," "Islamic extremists," "Islamic Jihad," and "Islamic fundamentalism."[44]

One should also consider the President's use of the word "crusade" to describe the war on terror and labeling the invasion of Afghanistan as "Operation Infinite Justice," language which may not have intended to be religious or pejorative, but nonetheless was interpreted that way by a number of Muslim leaders who interpreted this language as the pitting of a Christian America over and against the religion of Islam.[45] Martin Marty, Professor Emeritus from Chicago School of Divinity stated that, "Muslims find it hard not to hear the word 'Islam' when he (the President) uses this kind of language to describe the work of the terrorist network."[46] In his mind, the perception from the Muslim communities was that President Bush was identifying all Muslims with the terrorists and their actions, even if that was not his intent.

This perception puts the U.S. at a disadvantage in winning the hearts and minds of would be allies. Amy Black, who compiled a study of George Bush's speeches since "9-11" into an essay called, *With God on Our Side: Religion in George W. Bush's Foreign Policy Speeches,* stated, "…clips of the American President categorizing his enemies as evil and calling upon divine providence for protection and strength can play into the hands of terrorists calling for "holy war" against the United States."[47] This is to say that the enemy can manipulate the language to serve its own purpose, and effectively turning would be allies against the United States on the basis that the U.S. intent is a threat to the religion of Islam and Muslim communities worldwide.[48]

The prominent Muslim scholar, Bernard Lewis, agrees. He believes this perception of the United States as a Christian Nation is a particularly sensitive issue for Muslims who see their downfall as a people rooted in their defeat suffered during the Christian Crusades.[49] In his view, this defeat marked a critical loss of Muslim global influence and prompted a collective humiliation from which the Muslim community has not yet recovered.[50] In his book, The Crisis of Islam, he discussed how American and Arab mindsets differ in their perspective on history and what that history means for the present. History for Americans is frequently seen as something which took place in the past and for this reason is not relevant for the present, such as is implied with the saying, "That's history, forget it."[51] Muslims, however, tend to be keenly aware of their history, however seemingly distant it may seem to the westerner, and they believe it is keenly relevant to the present.[52] A westerner might reflect on the implications of the crusades and say, "That's regrettable, but that's history, let's forget it." A Muslim's response is more likely to be, "Yes, this is deeply regrettable and for this reason we will not forget." The more the enemy can successfully portray the U.S. as a Christian Nation bent on perpetuating this Muslim humiliation, the more it will effectively erode U.S. credibility for the Muslim communities worldwide.

To summarize, the religious rhetoric of the Bush administration exacerbated the negative perception that America is a Christian nation bent on destroying the religion of Islam. The use of the term "evil" to describe the enemy had the counterproductive result of alienating moderate Muslims whom the U.S. desired to secure as allies and working partners.

## CHANGE IN STRATEGY

In light of the backlash from Muslim communities and religious organizations within the U.S., strategists within the Bush administration recommended a reevaluation of its use. One such strategist was Karen Hughes who served as a Bush appointee as State Department Head of U.S. Policy until 2007. In reflecting on the President's use of religious rhetoric, she said, "I did recommend that (it be stopped), in my judgment, it's unfortunate because of the way it's heard. We ought to avoid the language of religion."[53] She also echoed the sentiment of Martin Marty and Amy Black who warned about the impending backlash to the President's language. In the words of Amy Black, "Whenever they (Muslims) hear 'Islamic extremism, Islamic jihad, Islamic fundamentalism,' they perceive it as a sort of an attack on their faith; that's the world view Osama bin Laden wants them to have."[54] This reevaluation resulted in a lessening of the President's rhetoric in his speeches during the latter part of his second term. The next chapter will reveal that the Obama administration benefitted from these lessons learned.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

In a keynote address on June 28, 2006, at a conference called *The Call to Renewal, Building a Covenant for a New America*, (hereafter called the Call to Renewal Speech) the then Senator Obama spoke about the relationship between religion and politics. This is worthy of examination because this speech articulated his rationale for the use of religious language in relation to the formation and promotion of public policy. In this speech he acknowledged the "mutual suspicion that sometimes exists between religious America and secular America," a suspicion so potentially explosive that many in his political party who share his ideology believe it is not worth addressing in the public square.[55]

The Senator however, sought to counter this mindset and broaden the scope of perception of what it means to be religious in America. He went on to explain, in his view, that being religious does not necessarily mean to be identified with a particular conservative ideology or evangelical theology; it also includes people who are "liberal" and "progressive," and for this reason it is appropriate for the religious people within his party who share his ideology to stand up and be heard and acknowledge that religion is and can be both a powerful source of strength in people's personal lives and a bona fide force for good in the world.[56]

The Senator went on to share how his religious convictions were shaped through his involvement with churches within the African-American tradition which engaged social issues and were a force for good in the communities with which they were involved, stating that in the historical struggle for justice, "I was able to see faith as more

than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world."[57] Because he believed religion could be a source for good in real and tangible ways, and that in fact religious belief was an essential component in the establishing of this good, it was entirely appropriate to integrate religion into the political conversation.

In addition to giving credence to religious faith as a force for good, the Senator also defended the use of religious language and imagery to encourage religious communities to be this "agency" for good precisely because this language had been a powerful motivating tool in the past, saying, "…if we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice."[58] Following this vein of thought, religious rhetoric has its appropriate place, and to remove it from the political conversation would mean a significant loss since religious language has been a powerful force in the voices of those who reformed the world and nation for good.

However, the Senator also made it clear that this integration of religious belief and religious language must acknowledge and show sensitivity toward the religious diversity and the pluralistic nature of the nation. In his words, "Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers."[59] This acknowledgement of diversity directly influenced his perspective on how "religiously motivated" people should address their concerns in the public arena.[60] He went on to say, "Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal rather that religion specific values."[61] He then explained that religiously based

issues, if they are to be addressed in the public square, must take religious diversity into account, and seek to appeal to universal values as opposed to values restricted to one faith group.[62]

This approach represents a significant departure from the perspective of many religiously motivated people, especially Evangelical Christians. They would be more inclined to embrace a sacred teaching as authoritative over principles espoused in other faiths or those who have no religiously based values, and for this reason would see the attempt to accommodate these beliefs and values as a compromise to a value they consider absolute and transcendent of any human value.[63] The inclination of these proponents is to say that this particular law or policy is wrong because their religious belief system says that it's wrong, and what others think about it does not matter.

The content of this speech serves as a framework in understanding President Obama's use of religious rhetoric and subsequently the way he applies it to his promotion of his National Security Strategy. As was done in the preceding chapter with President Bush, this chapter will examine the primary themes of the Obama administration's religious rhetoric, and will then look at its effects and implications.

## THEME OF INCLUSIVITY AND TOLERANCE

From the outset, the Obama administration's religious rhetoric strikes a different tone than that of the Bush administration. What is noteworthy is not what the Obama rhetoric contains but what it does not. Absent from President Obama's speeches and the administration's National Security Strategy documents are overt references to the War on Terror as a struggle of good versus evil - a prominent Bush theme - as well as the Bush themes of freedom as a gift of God, and America's responsibility to preserve

this “good” and “freedom” as God’s agent. Instead, the administration takes a more generalized approach, seeking to appeal to the “core values as a nation and as a people.”[64] This would appear to be an attempt to convey inclusivity and tolerance, which is a recurring theme in President Obama’s NSS promotion. In this instance, he not only did not use the same *kind* of religious language as President Bush, he omitted a good deal of religious language altogether.

This approach would seem to be in tension with the President’s affirmation of the use of religious language to shape his political vision, and accordingly one might ask why it plays a less visible role in comparison to that of the Bush administration. The answer is that he wants to avoid the negative impact which the Bush administration’s rhetoric had on the international community, specifically Muslims, as well as various faith groups within the United States. Despite the tension, this approach is consistent with his respect for diversity as articulated in his 2006 Call to Renewal speech.

Not only does the Obama NSS avoid the major religious rhetoric themes promulgated by the Bush administration, it quite deliberately removes the religious titles the Bush administration used to describe the identity and activity of the terrorists. These include phrases such as “radical Jihadists,” “Islamic extremists,” “Islamic Jihad,” “Islamic radicalism” and “Islamic fundamentalism.” Instead it uses more generic terms such as “a far-reaching network of hatred and violence.”[65] As previously mentioned, these phrases used in the Bush administration’s NSS, which may appear innocuous to an American audience, can be inflammatory for many Muslim communities and leaders. Moreover, the Obama NSS avoids the use of terms to describe the purpose and activity of the U.S. War on Terror which Muslims may construe as an attack on their religion

such as when President Bush used the word “crusade” to describe the cause of the War on Terror.

On the whole, one sees what political analyst Peter Feaver called a “softening” of the language in general in the Obama NSS documents with an intentional sensitivity toward the Muslim community.[66] His observation is that,”Bush labeled the ideology and Obama leaves it a bit vague,” and “…generally discusses values without the label.”[67] More than simply avoiding the use of religious rhetoric, the Obama NSS uses an intentionally generalist language in order to gain Muslim support and to acknowledge the diversity of religious thought and practice, as is consistent with his 2006 Call to Renewal speech on the relationship between politics and religion. Put another way, it could be said that one of the distinguishing characteristics of President Obama’s religious rhetoric is its absence when his intent is to promote certain aspects of inclusivity and tolerance.

THEME OF UNITY THROUGH COMMONALITY

While President Obama may be reluctant to employ religious rhetoric when he considers it potentially inflammatory and divisive, he is much more willing and more explicit in his use of it when he wants to emphasize what religions share in common. The reason for this is to create unity. One clearly sees this religious theme in a speech the President made at the University of Cairo in Cairo Egypt on June 2, 2009 (hereafter called the Cairo Speech). On this occasion the President addressed the tension shared between the United States and Muslims throughout the world and expressed his desire to forge a new beginning with them, a relationship he hoped could be “…based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and

Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition."[68] Instead the President expressed his desire to show how they, "…overlap, and share common principles - principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings."[69]

In Cairo the President also acknowledged Islam's contributions to the world and society, reiterated his administration's policy that the United States is not at war against Islam but against those who pose a threat to security, spoke positively about his interaction with Muslims in his work as a community organizer, and affirmed Islam as part of the fabric of America which makes it a great nation.[70] Rather than focusing on what divides, he encouraged his audience to focus on what unites, saying, "all of us share common aspirations - to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God."[71]

Another commonality he cited was, "the one rule that lies at the heart of every religion - that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This truth transcends nations and peoples."[72] By saying this, the President's language connotes an inclusivity which embraces more than the religion of Islam and the Muslim communities throughout the world, it is encompassing of all religions. This "rule" of "doing unto others as we would have them do to us," is a universal religious value of mutual respect, which thereby creates the imperative for all religious persons to be peacemakers and reconcilers.[73] At the conclusion of his speech to this Muslim audience he quoted three sacred texts from three different religions, which reiterate the same theme:

> The Holy Koran (Muslim sacred text) tells us, "O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." The Talmud (Jewish sacred text) tells us: "The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace." The Holy Bible (Christian

> sacred text) tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now, that must be our work here on Earth.[74]

By quoting these sources from three distinct faith groups, the President sought to unify adherents to these religions with the United States toward a common goal of establishing and sustaining peace.

THEME OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Another theme which is prevalent in President Obama's religious rhetoric is the theme of social justice and equality.[75] Much of this rhetoric is rooted in his own theological convictions stemming from his religious faith journey and experiences with socially active churches as a community organizer in Chicago and is in concert with his remarks in the 2006 Call to Renewal speech when he said, "I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change."[76] One also sees in his speeches the influences of the social activism of Martin Luther King Jr., who frequently cited biblical references to enhance his cause for justice, civil rights, and equality for the Black community. At the 2007 General Synod Convention of the United Church of Christ he said, "My faith teaches me that I can sit in church and pray all I want, but I won't be fulfilling God's will unless I go out and do the Lord's work."[77] This theme was brought to light from the outset of his presidency, as shown in these words from his inaugural address on January 20, 2009:

> …in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.[78]

For the President, this equality pertains to more than civil liberties and people's rights to exercise those liberties, it also relates to one's *ability* to exercise these liberties based on one's social and economic standing. The understanding is that one cannot truly exercise one's freedoms while "enslaved" by poverty and the unjust social structures which diminish these freedoms; that is, one cannot pursue "their full measure of happiness" if their poverty laden circumstances prevent them.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that in this inaugural address, the President employed a "prophetic" rhetoric, which as discussed in chapter one is rhetoric which speaks to the perceived deficiencies in America. Prophetic rhetoric spots the gap between what the nation is and what the nation aspires to be, pointing out the tension between what the nation espouses and what the nation actually does. By invoking this specific scriptural reference to "give up childish things," the President clearly criticized the nation for not living up to the values of freedom and equality it promotes, and then called on Americans to strive to meet the value that, "…all deserve a chance to pursue their measure of happiness." Martin Marty agreed. He said of the Presidents' remarks, "There was a twist; it wasn't that the nation is perfect…but that we have failed to live up to our ideals."[79] Religion scholar Diana Butler Bass noted the President's words represented a departure from the language of leaders in the past, "…which was a jubilant exultation of American rightness, that we're a chosen people….This speech had more of a, 'We're an almost-chosen people.'"[80] On the whole, President Obama utilizes prophetic rhetoric more than did President Bush, and his use of it is most prevalent when he is promoting the theme of equality and justice.

Moreover, while it is true that the President more often uses the theme of equality and social justice to promote his domestic economic agenda, it also finds expression in the promotion of his NSS, albeit in a more implicit way. In his inaugural address, the President pledged to the poor nations of the world to, "…work alongside you (the poor nations) to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds."[81] In saying this, he made no specific reference to religion, faith, or sacred text, but it is implied in what was said earlier in the speech about the "God-given promise that all are equal and all are free." In stating this, the President sought to make it clear that he is concerned about social and economic justice for everyone and not just those living in America.[82]

SUMMARY OF OBAMA RHETORIC THEMES

The Obama NSS seeks to convey a message of inclusivity and tolerance to the diversity of religions both within U.S. borders and throughout the world. This is especially true in relation to the religion of Islam. While the President is not averse to using religious rhetoric in promoting public policy, he is reluctant to use religious language which might be perceived as offensive to the Muslim community. For this reason, one sees less religiously laden language in the President's promotion of his NSS. When he does utilize religious language, the President focuses on a social and economic justice theme which promotes dignity and equality among all, or he focuses on the theme which promotes beliefs and values which are held in what he considers common among the predominant religions of the world in order to unify adherents in the pursuit of a common goal.

## SUMMARY OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Aside from the absence of the religious rhetoric and the softening of the language, it is worth noting that the strategic objectives pertaining to the international Muslim communities in the 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT) are actually quite similar to many of the objectives found in the Bush NSS documents. As stated in the Bush strategy, the Obama strategy repeatedly asserted that their administration's contention is not with the religion of Islam but with the organization of Al-Qaida, which "draws on a distorted interpretation of Islam to justify the murder of Muslim and non-Muslim innocents."[83] Also consistent with the Bush administration is Obama's stress on the importance of gaining the support of "allies, partners, and multilateral institutions, including Muslim partners."[84]

One also sees a reiteration of the Bush priority of adherence to the core values in the shaping of NSS, that is, "respecting human rights, fostering good governance, respecting privacy and civil liberties, committing to security and transparency, and upholding the rule of law."[85] The Obama NSCT's assertion that, "The United States must stand for freedom, fairness, equality, dignity, hope and opportunity" is certainly in concert with the Bush administration's NSS emphasis on, "promoting freedom, justice, and human dignity."[86] The differences pertain more to *how* these objectives are promoted. Far from being a repudiation of the Bush strategy, the Obama strategy embraces many of the same themes, but in many instances either softens or omits the religious rhetoric.

Additionally, there is common ground found within the themes of their religious rhetoric. President Bush's theme on freedom as a gift of God, rooted in the dignity of all

persons because one is created by God, also finds expression in the Obama rhetoric, albeit in a more subtle way. President Obama is more explicit in his expression of these themes when they are conveyed as commonalities shared with other religions in order to promote unity within the international community, but less inclined when expressed as particular to his own faith belief. It should also be mentioned that President Obama's perception of freedom and dignity are applied as building blocks for his theme of social justice and equality and what he believes to be the government's moral obligation to enable this justice and equality through real dollars and cents assistance. In contrast, President Bush's emphasis on freedom pertained more to enabling people to exercise their civil liberties without government involvement or assistance.

The most significant difference between the two presidents in terms of their rhetoric concerns President Bush's use of the term "evil" to describe the enemy and the promotion of his NSS as a war against evil, and President Obama's complete removal of this word from any discussion promoting his NSS.[87] Whereas President Bush sought to unify the international community by asking them to join the U.S. in the fight against evil, President Obama sought this unity by voicing what he understood to be commonly espoused values shared among nations and values shared among major religions.

## EVALUATION OF OBAMA RHETORIC

The debate concerning President Obama's use of religious rhetoric centers primarily on the "softening" of language (described previously by Peter Feaver) in order to promote the aforementioned themes. As discussed earlier, the Obama administration softened its language in part to support these themes and also because it wanted to avoid the counterproductive backlash which the Bush administration

experienced from Muslims who interpreted his rhetoric as an affront to their faith. This section will examine how contingents in both the United States and the international community received and interpreted this "softened" language and assess its value in light of these effects.

The "softened" rhetoric of the President has worked to the administration's advantage in that it has improved relations with the Muslim world or at least has not antagonized Muslim leaders the way that the Bush rhetoric had done.[88] A number of international Muslim leaders voiced their appreciation of the Obama NSS precisely because of its removal of religious rhetoric and terms which many Muslims have considered offensive. Some examples include Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, who applauded the administration's willingness to omit religious rhetoric from its NSS, saying, "It is a good message of assurance, and differs from the former American administration's position on this matter which showed no real understanding of Islamic countries," and also expressed his belief that this approach would foster better relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world.[89] Another example of support is expressed through the words of Jordanian lawmaker Hamada Faraaneh who said, "It's (May 2010 NSS) a clear indication of President Obama's substantial understanding of the intricacies of Muslim politics."[90] Public opinion polls from the time of the publication of the 2010 NSS document showed a consistent improvement of positive opinion toward the U.S.[91] It appears that the administration's goal of conveying the message of tolerance by removing potentially inflammatory religious rhetoric was at least partially achieved at the time of the publishing of the May 2010 NSS.[92]

That Obama eschewed language which could be interpreted as depicting America as a Christian nation, also has its merits. He explicitly stated in his 2006 Call to Renewal speech, "The U.S. is no longer a Christian nation," and goes to great lengths in his public conversations to show deference for the religious plurality of the nation by using religious language to promote what he considers to be shared values among religions rather than espousing values specific to one religion.[93] Even though the omission of this particular kind of religiously couched language did not endear him to the Evangelical Protestant base within the United States, it clearly has worked to the advantage of better U.S. relationships with the international community in general and the Muslim international community specifically.

However, critics such as Boaz Ganor, writer for the Jerusalem Post, have argued that the Obama administration's omission of certain religious terms has resulted in an oversimplification of the religion of Islam and its relation to National Security.[94] As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons the Obama administration omitted the term "jihadists" to describe the terrorists is because this is a "legitimate tenet of Islam," and the administration did not want to convey a description of the terrorist operatives as a legitimate expression of Islam.[95] The concern of the Obama administration was that terms such as these actually distort true meaning.[96] Their contention all along – as well as with the Bush administration – was that "Al-Qaida and its terrorist affiliates" were the true enemy and security threat and these entities did not have the backing of legitimate Muslim communities world-wide.[97]

Yet Ganor, in his Jerusalem Post article, *If Global Jihad Isn't the Enemy, What Is?* argued that it is not that simple, asserting that the Obama administration "…has

essentially taken the complicated, multifaceted security threat posed by the global jihad movement, and made it appear that the threat is contained within Al-Qaida and its network of affiliates"[98] In other words, he is saying that NSS must take into account that the threads and components of Islamic tenets are in fact interwoven into the fabric of the terrorist ideology and intent and cannot be removed for the sake of simplification. His contention is that it is an oversimplification to categorize Al-Qaida as an aberration of the religion of Islam because the religious aspect is very much a part of the terrorist identity. This means that regardless of whether the terrorist network represents mainstream Islam or not, it is undeniably a community which defines itself as a religious movement based within the religious framework of Islam.

Deborah Weiss, from the American Security Council Foundation also expressed concerns about the softening of language. In her article, *No Such Thing As Islamic Terrorism?* Weiss argued that this softening is counterproductive to the promotion of NSS because it is, in her words, "an appeasement of terrorists."[99] Her reasoning is that removing language which proves offensive to Muslims actually "serves to embolden them" (specifically the terrorists) and weakens those who seek to resist them.[100] From this perspective, the softening of the rhetoric creates an even greater threat to national security and a greater U.S. vulnerability. If the concern is about offending would-be Muslim partners to assist the U.S. security efforts, her contention is that they, "…should have no reason to feel offended if the U.S. takes aim at radicals who in addition to putting Jews, Christians and atheists in danger, equally threaten the lives and freedoms of moderate Muslims."[101] Her view is that the elimination of "offensive words" will not eliminate the underlying threat conveyed by these words.[102] According to this line of

reasoning, it is in some respects appropriate for religious rhetoric in this context to have an offensive quality to it, because it is directed toward perpetrators of terror who deserve to be offended. From this vantage point, the weakness of the Obama rhetoric is precisely its vagueness and its softness which the terrorist network can use to its advantage. Strength is conveyed in the courage to label the terrorist network for what she believes it is.

In reviewing what has been argued about the softening of President Obama's rhetoric, one must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of his approach. Responses from Arab states have seemingly reinforced the Obama administration's approach but critics such as Ganor and Weiss believe this softening undermines the War on Terror. This poses a critical question. Does the Obama administration's approach create a greater threat to national security or does it lessen it?

The strength of Ganor's position is his assessment that terrorism is a "multifaceted security threat" which cannot be reduced to an ideology of one extremist group, namely Al-Qaida. This perspective recognizes that the religion of Islam is not monolithic but is in fact disparate in its beliefs and application of beliefs. This means certain contingents of Muslims external to Al-Qaida may be likely to support terrorist violence while others may not and it is these layers of diversity within Islam which make the religion and the practice of its adherents multifaceted and complex. His contention is that the problem is with the adherents of Islam who do not want to acknowledge or confront these tensions and with Muslim leaders who refuse to address these tensions within their religion.[103] Yet, if one agrees with his assessment about Islam's complexity, it must be asked how a hardening of rhetoric, as opposed to the softening of it as

President Obama has done, would better address the problem. The Bush administration employed a hardened rhetoric using binary religious language and the result was a backlash from Muslims across the spectrum of Islamic beliefs. One wonders how the reaction would be any different if the United States would start to point the finger of accusation at adherents of Islam as a whole, challenging them to hold their various contingents accountable, as Ganor suggests. Surely this would continue to alienate the contingent of Muslims the U.S. is seeking to secure as allies.

In response to the Deborah Weiss' assertion that President Obama's softened rhetoric is an "appeasement to terrorists" which actually serves to "embolden them," it should be observed that the Bush administration's rhetoric, with its "hardened" quality and forthright labeling of the enemy as evil, also had its emboldening effects on the terrorists precisely because the language was perceived as belligerent. If appeasement can embolden an enemy, it must be said that vilification can as well. In regards to her reasoning that "moderate" Muslims should not be offended by language which she believes appropriately describes the terrorists and the threat they represent, it should be remembered that this was the Bush administration's reasoning as well, and the result was a backlash from these very contingents the President did not want to offend. The issue is not about how language might offend terrorists, as she stated, but how it affects Muslims whom the U.S desires as partners in the War on Terror.

This concern about how language impacts Muslims relates directly to President Obama's unity through commonality theme, that is, his desire to unite various religious beliefs by emphasizing what religions share in common rather than what divides them. Some also see this as a softening in that it does not draw intelligible and identifiable

differences among religions, differences which a number of Muslims may want to be conveyed. A more penetrating question concerns whether President Obama's commonality approach takes into account the diversity represented within the religion of Islam itself because the different factions within Islam do not share these espoused values in common with the rest of the religion's adherents. It is worth heeding Boaz Ganor's assertion that the religion of Islam's relation to the terrorist threat is "multi-faceted." Attempts to simplify this complex religion by trying to reduce it to its essence are counterproductive to NSS.

Curiously, this oversimplification is a quality found in the Bush administration's religious rhetoric, albeit it is arrived at through a different tactic. Both the Bush and Obama NSS documents emphasize the importance of gaining support of the adherents of Islam in order to meet their NSS objectives, namely the need to secure them as partners to eliminate terrorist organizations. Both administrations' strategies employ religious rhetoric to gain this support by first affirming Islam as a legitimate religion and asserting that the terrorist operatives do not represent the essence of Islam. The tactic of the Bush administration however, was to achieve this through a hardened rhetoric of "good versus evil," while the Obama administration's tactic has focused on the unity through commonality theme.

Both approaches have their merits. The language of the Bush administration drew a clearly delineated line between good and evil, and people of all religions were invited to choose between the cause of one or the other. The appeal was not necessarily to the tenets of the Muslim faith specifically, but to their willingness to join the cause of good in the struggle against evil. The Obama tactic was to garner support,

as just mentioned, by focusing on commonalities, that is, beliefs shared among the major religions of the world. Yet, even though the rhetoric of President Bush was far more damaging and alienating, neither approach accounts for the disparate nature and complexity of the religion of Islam.

# CHAPTER 4

## RELIGIOUS RHETORIC AND THE ROAD AHEAD

The September 2002 and 2006 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS) documents promulgated by the Bush Administration, as well as the June 2011 *National Strategy For Counterterrorism* (NSCT) by the Obama Administration, clearly articulate the importance of working with Muslim partners throughout the world to defeat terrorism.[104] Clearly this is the key strategic issue with which religious rhetoric directly relates. The Obama NSCT document acknowledges that the "U.S. partners best with nations who share our common values" (as the United States), and that these have been the most effective partnerships.[105] Yet, it also acknowledges that, "in some cases partnerships are in place with countries with whom the United States has very little in common except for the desire to defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents."[106]

These partners (or potential partners) who may not share the same values as the U.S. but share the same strategic goals are precisely those the U.S. must continually contend for in order to garner or maintain their support. Those who share U.S. values are likely going to remain as partners while those who are diametrically opposed to the U.S. and want to see its demise, will not likely ever become U.S. partners. It is this "in between" group which the U.S. has the most likely chance to win over. Religious rhetoric, and the way it is used, can either foster these relations or hinder them. It only makes sense to be sensitive to this dynamic even it means softening language or omitting language which has the potential of offending.

In light of this consideration, it is imperative for leaders who wish to utilize religiously framed language, to take the following factors into account:

1. *The ambiguity of religious language*. This means leaders must continually be assessing the intent of what they say over and against the perception of what is said, asking the question, "Has my intent been understood?" Because religious language can be interpreted in various ways, many of which are inflammatory, it only makes sense to explain one's intent.
2. *The manipulation of religious language*. There needs to be a continued recognition that the enemy will manipulate religious language to serve its own purpose. A primary example of this occurred when President Bush used the word "crusade" to describe the War on Terror and Al Qaida, in response, described it as an attack on the religion of Islam in order to garner support from Islam's adherents. It is better to omit religious language from NSS promotion than to have the enemy manipulate it to its advantage.
3. *The religious diversity of the nation and the world.* The integration of religiously infused thought must be done in a way that takes into account the religious diversity of the nation and the world. The very words which can inspire unity with one segment of a population also have the power to divide another. As long as NSS calls for a high degree of inclusivity, leaders must be willing to surrender a religious narrative which can be construed as offensive or excluding to Muslims across a broad spectrum.
4. *The complexity of the Muslim religious culture*. The Muslim religious culture is disparate and not monolithic and it is futile to attempt to whittle Islam down to its

"essence." In terms of how this relates to terrorist operatives, it is an oversimplification to say that they do not represent Islam. It is better to say that Islam is by nature disparate and Al-Qaida represents a violent expression of it than to say a certain faction represents Islam and another faction does not. The religious culture is much too complex to reduce it to these categories of simplicity.

5. *The power of history in the Muslim mindset*. As Bernard Lewis indicated, for Muslims, history is a dynamic which continues to be lived out in the present, and historical events which brought defeat and humiliation continue to be felt among Muslims as a people. This is especially true in regards to the Christian Crusades and religious language which can be construed as a reminder of this humiliation should be avoided.
6. *The severe antagonism Muslim states have toward the United States*. This is especially evident during the present Arab Spring movement occurring in the major Arab states. Hostility continues to rage against the U.S. either for its lack of response or for what is seen as an intrusion. This will not be reconciled through an elimination of religious rhetoric in the political discourse, but its usage without consideration to its consequences can exacerbate or at least reinforce this perception.

## CONCLUSION

Religious rhetoric will continue to be a player in American politics well into the future, making its mark in the full spectrum of the political venue, including National Security Strategy. As long as expressions of civil religion remain meaningful for the

American populace, leaders will continue to dispense priestly, prophetic, and pastoral rhetoric in various contexts to address the spectrum of issues which define the nation's meaning and purpose. U.S. Presidents and other political leaders will continue to articulate the national purpose through this rhetoric to motivate and inspire the American people as leaders of the past have done. This will occur, not because the religious component is a necessary political window dressing for political success (although some may recognize it only for its utilitarian value), but because religion is a genuine underpinning of influence for many people in the United States. If this influence remains real, it only makes sense that it will continue to impact people's worldview and perspectives on decisions which are being made in the political sphere, compelling national leaders to speak to it or at least acknowledge it.

Moreover, the religious convictions of the leaders themselves will also influence the way religious language is integrated into the political arena. This paper attempted to show, in part, that the religious beliefs of Presidents Bush and Obama influenced how the two integrated religion into the promotion of their public policy, namely their national security strategies. As their religious beliefs shaped their personal values, they also contributed to the shaping of their political values, and when articulated in the public arena, powerfully resonated with contingents whose values were the same. Rhetoric is the language of persuasion, and religious rhetoric has significant persuasive power for those who value religion, whether it be their own or one of the variant expressions of civil religion. Yet, it must be said, this public expression of religious beliefs can also produce unintended consequences with those who do not share the same values, both within the United States and the international community. As long as religious rhetoric

remains part of the political conversation, it will have the power to inspire *and* offend, to unify *and* divide.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: Tenth Edition (Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc.,1996), 1004.

[2] Robert Bellah, *Civil Religion in America,* Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, from the issue entitled, "Religion in America", Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, 1-21), 1.

[3] Robert Handy, A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 22.

[4] Ibid., 24.

[5] Bellah, 1.

[6] This is significant because of President Kennedy's religious affiliation as a Roman Catholic. Throughout his campaign for the presidency, he continually insisted that his accountability was not to the Pope in Rome, but to the constitution of the United States.

[7] Bellah, 3-4.

[8] Ibid., 3.

[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Amarnath Amarasingam, "Glenn Beck and the Restoration of American Civil Religion," http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/08_glenn_beck_and_the_restoration_of_american_civil_religion.html (accessed 6 November 2011), 1.

[11] The Old Testament Prophets in the religion of Judaism were those who warned the people of Israel about impending doom because of their lack of faithfulness and their unwillingness/inability to meet the standard of what it meant to be a covenant people. Because the people of Israel were considered God's chosen people, they were required to live according to the covenant relationship their God had established with them. When they did not, the prophets took on the role of pointing out their deficiencies and the impending consequences. Accordingly, the prophetic role in civil religion centers on America's deficiencies in meeting the standard of its divine purpose as a nation.

[12] David Domke and Kevin Coe, *How Bush's God-Talk is Different;* available at http://www.belief.com/News /Politics/2005/01/aspx (accessed 30 October 2011). Domke and Coe made this observation: No other president since Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933 has mentioned God so often in his inaugurations or State of the Unions. The closest to Bush's average of six references per each of these addresses is Ronald Reagan, who averaged 4.75 in his comparable speeches. Jimmy Carter, considered as pious as they come among U.S. presidents, only had two God mentions in four addresses. Other also-rans in total God talk were Franklin Roosevelt at 1.69 and Lyndon Johnson at 1.50 references per inaugurals and State of the Union.

[13] The President integrated religious themes into his first inaugural address and a commencement address at Yale, but these themes did not relate to foreign policy and the United States' position in the world.

[14] Amarasingam., 1.

[15] Taken from transcript titled: *President Bush's Prayer Service Remarks*, September 14, 2001. http//www.opm.gov/guidance/09-14-01gwb.htm (accessed November 20, 2011).

[16] Taken from transcript title: *President Bush's State of the Union Speech,* January 29, 2002 State of the Union Speech: available at http://articles.cnn.com/2002-01-29/politics/bush.speech. txt_1_firefighter-returns-terrorist-training-camps-interim-leader/3?_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS (accessed November 10, 2011).

[17] Ibid., 8.

[18] Ibid., 10.

[19] Taken from the transcript titled: *President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech United States Military Academy*, West Point, NY, June 1, 2002; available at http://georgewbushwhitehouse .archives.gov/ news/ releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html (Accessed October 8, 2011).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Taken from the transcript titled: *Text: George Bush's Speech in Berlin*, May 23, 2002; available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/may/23/usa georgebush; (Accessed December 15, 2011).

[22] *National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* March 2006, 9; available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/file/rss_viewer/national_security .pdf; (accessed 6 November 2011).

[23] January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address.

[24] 2006 NSS Document., i-ii, 1-2. Also see prologue (no pages provided) of the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, available at: http:// merlin.ndu.edu/whitepapers/usnss 2002.pdf (accessed 6 November 2011).

[25] 2002 NSS., iv.

[26] Ibid., 3.

[27] President Bush's West Point Speech.

[28] Taken from transcript titled: *Commencement Address at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon Wisconsin*, May 14, 2004; available at: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php? pid=63589#axzz 1i2socLzs (Accessed October 4, 2011).

[29] Ibid.

[30] President Bush Prayer Service Remarks at Washington Cathedral, September 14, 2001.

[31] Ibid.

[32] T. Walter Herbert, Faith-Based War: From 9-11 to Catastrophic Success in Iraq, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2009), 68.

[33] This label can be problematic in that there is a spectrum of religious belief within evangelicalism.

[34] James K. Wellman, Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 195.

[35] Ibid., 196.

[36] Ibid., 198.

[37] Ibid., 198.

[38] Chris Mooney, *W's Christian Nation: How Bush Promotes Religion and Erodes the Separation of Church and State* , 1; available at: http://prospect.org/article/ws-christian-nation (accessed January 15, 2012).

[39] Ibid., 2.

[40] Wellman, 201.

[41] Ibid., 201.

[42] Amy E. Black, With God on Our Side: Religion in George W. Bush's Foreign Policy Speeches. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association; Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5, 2004, 3.

[43] Amarasingam, 1.

[44] Matt Apuzzo, *Obama Tries To Change Terrorism Rhetoric, Remove Terms Like 'Islamic Radicalism' From National Security Document*, April 7, 2010. http://muslimmatters.org/2010/04/07/the-associated-press-obama-tries-to-change-terrorism-rhetoric-remove-terms-like-islamic-radicalism-from-national-security-document/ (Accessed January 15, 2012).

[45] Ibid.

[46] Martin Marty, "The Sin of Pride," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003, 32. In this article Marty also points out that the President's association and identification with the evangelical community further exacerbated this perception because many of those who proclaim themselves as evangelicals also profess the religion of Islam as inherently "wicked" and violent. An example of this is Franklin Graham who claimed Islam as evil but was invited to the national prayer breakfast. While attempting to be inclusive but conveying a message perceived as exclusive, the President created a tension which many in the international community found irreconcilable.

[47] Black, 5.

[48] This is especially applicable to those who refer to themselves as Muslim moderates. The recruiting ground for potential Muslim allies is among the moderates, and the more effectively Al-Qaida influencers can make the case to moderates that the U.S. wants to destroy their religion, the more likely the U.S. will lose credibility with this contingent. This is the backfire effect of language which demonizes the enemy.

[49] Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003), xvi-xxvii. In this introduction to the book, the author discusses the humiliation of the Muslim people feel they have experienced because of the land which the powers of Christendom took away. He goes on to mention that the culmination of this offense came with the defeat of the Ottoman sultanate in 1918. From this perspective, the ongoing conflict involving U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, are in fact continuations of the humiliations initiated with the Christian Crusades.

[50] Ibid., xviii.

[51] Ibid., xix.

[52] Ibid., xix.

[53] Apuzzo.

[54] Ibid.,

[55] Taken from transcript titled: *Reach out to Christ, and to the Christian Faithful*, June 28, 2006. The full name of the conference was *Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America,* held in Washington DC; available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/28/us/politics/2006obamaspeech.html?pagewanted=all (Accessed January 15, 2012).

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Wellman,196. James Wellman, citing the works of Christian Smith, noted that "American evangelicals thrive because they engage and are in tension with a wider, secular American culture….This tension is the source of evangelical success, giving evangelicals a distinctive identity and group dynamism."

[64] *National Security Strategy on Counterterrorism*, June 2011. See the President's stated introductory remarks to the document (no page number provided). Also refer to section on Adhering to U.S. Core Values, 5-6; available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/ sites/default/files/ counterterrorismstrategy.pdf. (Accessed 6 November 2011).

[65] Ibid.

[66] Peter Feaver, *Obama Security Strategy: Real Change or 'Bush Lite'?* available at: http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/05/27/obama_s_national_security_strategy_real_change_or_just_bush_lite (accessed December 18, 2011).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Taken from the transcript titled: *Transcript: President Obama Addresses Muslim World in Cairo*, June 4, 2009; available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/ 2009/06 /04/ AR2009060401117.html (accessed October 14, 2011).

[69] The dignity of human persons was also a Bush theme. He was willing to articulate that this dignity stemmed from being created by God and being created in God's image. While Obama would concur with that affirmation because of his own faith beliefs, he is careful not to voice this explicitly.

[70] President Obama's June 4, 2009 Cairo Speech.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Senator Obama 2006 Call to Renewal Speech.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Taken from transcript titled: *Politics of Conscience*, June 23, 2007. The speech was delivered by then Senator Obama at the United Church of Christ General Synod meeting, held in Hartford CT. It should also be noted that this Social Gospel theme was prevalent in the speeches of Senator Obama when he was a candidate for president. Available at: http://www.ucc.org/news/significant-speeches/a-politics-of-conscience.html (accessed November 20, 2011).

[78] Taken from the transcript of President Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address, titled: *Obama Inauguration Speech*, January 20, 2009; available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/01/20/president-obamas-inaugura_n_159370.html (accessed December 15, 2012).

[79] Daniel Burke and Kevin Eckstrom, *Obama Refashions America's Old-Time (Civil) Religion*, January 21, 2009. This quote from Martin Marty is contained in this article; available at http://www.christianity.com/11598404/ (accessed November 10, 2011).

[80] Ibid. This quote from Diana Butler Bass is contained within this article.

[81] President Obama 2009 Inaugural Address.

[82] Feaver, 1. It is also worth noting that the May 2010 NSS document, one sees an interweaving of the administration's domestic policy with its global strategy. Peter Feaver reasons that it is appropriate that domestic policy strategy be a part of the foreign policy discussion because, "our ability to meet global challenges and opportunities is a function of our national power and the foundation of national power is the health of our economy and domestic society."

[83] Ibid., 2-3.

[84] Ibid., 3-4

[85] Ibid., 3-4.

[86] See the preface to the 2006 NSS document and the NSCT 2010 document.

[87] This is confirmed not only in the contents of the NSS documents themselves, but also in the speeches of the two presidents. One sees no overt reference to the enemy as "evil" in any of his speeches promoting his national security strategy.

[88] A recent Pew survey (March – May 21 2011) showed that Muslim states continued to see relations with the United States as negative as they were five years ago. This same survey points out that Muslim publics overwhelmingly see their lack of prosperity as a direct result of U.S. and Western

policies, stating that “a median of 53% of those surveyed say U.S. and Western policies are one of the top two reasons why Muslim nations are not wealthier.”

[89] Apuzzo.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., Matt Apuzzo cites a similarity of the Obama administration’s strategy with that of the Reagan administration’s strategy when President Reagan visited China in 1984. Rather than speaking directly about ideologies, he spoke of ways that the nations could cooperate in meeting mutual goals.

[93] Obama 2006 Call to Renewal Speech.

[94] Boaz Ganor, *If Global Jihad Isn’t the Enemy, What Is?*, June 16, 2010. Accessed from the Jerusalem Post Home Page; available at http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/ Article.aspx?id=178651 (accessed October 14, 2011).

[95] Ibid.

[96] 2010 NSS document.

[97] 2011 NSCT., 3. Here the document states, “It (Al Qaida) draws on a distorted interpretation of Islam to justify the murder of Muslim and non-Muslim innocents.” Also see the March 2006 NSS, 9. Here it is said, “These terrorists distort the idea of Jihad into a call for murder against those they regard as apostates or unbelievers.”

[98] Ganor.

[99] Deborah Weiss, *No Such Thing as Islamic Terrorism?*, May 18, 2010; available at http://americansagainsthate.blogspot.com/2010/05/no-such-thing-as-islamic-terrorist.html (Accessed February 3, 2012).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ganor.

[104] See the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*; 2006 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, as well as the June 2011 National Security Strategy on Conterterrorism.

[105] June 2011 NSCT, 6.

[106] Ibid., 7.